

Miami-Dade Transit Presents

# The Black History Tours



*Highlighting historical landmarks  
in Miami's African American  
Community.*

MIAMI-DADE



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## Looking Forward to the Past...

Miami-Dade Transit began the Black History tours in 1994 as a contribution to the celebration of black history. The free tours are offered each Saturday in February and feature landmarks in Miami's historical Black communities, highlighting their vibrant and rich history.



## Historical Black Communities

Miami's Black community has a rich and varied history dating back to the early 1890s. The first settlement of Blacks—most from the Bahamas—was established in 1892 on land which today is part of Coconut Grove and Coral Gables. African Americans from the southern states migrated to Coconut Grove in the 1920s.

As early as 1896, Blacks arrived in the city of Miami to help build Henry Flagler's railroad. They settled to the west of the railroad tracks in Colored Town, today's Overtown. Overtown flourished for many decades with its own schools, churches, and businesses. But the area began to decline with desegregation and the rise of expressways. The Black Archives History and Research Foundation is spearheading an effort to revitalize Overtown by developing an Historic Overtown Folklife Village.

Over the years, Blacks established several communities around Miami-Dade County. Included are pocket communities in Lemon City (Little Haiti), Goulds, Homestead-Florida City, Washington Park, Railroad Shop (Allapattah), South Miami, Brownsville, Seminola (Hialeah), Opa-locka, Perrine, Richmond Heights, West Little River, and North County (New Liberty City).

## Coconut Grove

The McFarlane Homestead subdivision (Oak Avenue/Brooker St.) was started on land purchased by Flora McFarlane in 1892. Many of today's residents of this area are descendants of the original Bahamian settlers and still live in houses their ancestors built.

E.W.F. Stirrup, one of Coconut Grove's Black pioneers, owned much of what is today's downtown Coconut Grove. The Charlotte Jane Memorial Park cemetery on Charles Avenue and Douglas Road was owned by the Stirrup family.

The Stirrup house was built in 1897 on Charles Avenue (at Main Highway). According to his granddaughter, Dr. Dazelle Dean Simpson, E.W.F. Stirrup stated in his will that the house was never to be sold, but made available to anyone in the family needing a place to live. Dr. Simpson, who grew up in her grandfather's home, is Florida's first board-certified Black pediatrician. She practiced in Overtown and Liberty City for over 40 years before retiring.



*Charlotte Jane Cemetery*

The original Mariah Brown house (3298 Charles Ave.), razed in 1999, was the oldest house in Coconut Grove. It was built in 1890 of virgin pine wood. Mariah and Ernest Brown, immigrants from the island of Eleuthera in the Bahamas, were the first homeowners on the Grove's historical Charles Avenue. A replica of the house and a sign mark the original location.

## Overtown

The Lyric Theater (NW 8th St./ 2nd Ave.) was built between 1913 and 1917 by Gedar Walker, an entrepreneur who settled in Miami before 1900. The Lyric was located on Avenue G, which is now NW 2 Avenue. For 50 years, the Lyric was a major entertainment center in the Black community.

Greater Bethel AME Church (245 NW 8 St.) was organized in 1896, making it the oldest continuing all-Black congregation in Miami.



*Greater Bethel AME Church*

Courthouse. The first church on the present site was built in 1898. Mt. Zion was instrumental in raising funds for Christian Hospital, Miami's only Black hospital, and claims D.A. Dorsey as its first trustee.

Dorsey House (250 NW 9 St.) was the home of Dana Albert (D.A.) Dorsey, Miami's first Black millionaire. Dorsey started as a carpenter and acquired his millions by buying land, building houses, and renting to Blacks. This respected philanthropist donated land to local government for a library, schools, and a park in the Black community. In tribute, Northwest 3 Avenue bears his name. This replica of the original home of D.A. Dorsey was completed

and dedicated in 1995. It is the first completed project of the Historic Overtown Folklife Village project.

The Cola-Nip Building (across from Dorsey House on NW 9th St.) once exemplified a successful Black-owned business that thrived in Overtown in the 1920s and 1930s. It was started by Osborne Jenkins and William Sampson in 1920. Cola-Nip Bottling produced Cola-Nip, Orange Smile, and Peach Whip, all carbonated beverages. The company used the building from 1925, when it was constructed, to about 1940. Sadly, the roof caved in during 1999's Hurricane Irene and the building was torn down.

The 17-room Chapman House (NW 14 St. between 6th and 7th avenues, on the grounds of Booker T. Washington Middle School) was built in 1923 and was the home and office of Dr. William A.

Chapman Sr., a prominent medical doctor in Miami's Black community. The house and land were deeded to Miami-Dade County Public Schools by Dr.



*Chapman House*

William A. Chapman Jr., a well-known dentist, and has been restored and designated a historical site through the efforts of the Black Archives. Chapman House is used as a learning and exhibition center for Miami-Dade County youth.

## Liberty City

Liberty Square Project (NW 62nd St./ 12th Ave.) resulted from an attempt by Episcopalian priest Rev. John E. Culmer to relieve overcrowding in Overtown. This was the first public housing project in the state of Florida. The area was known as Liberty City. It was first developed in the 1920s by Floyd Davis, a White developer, who purchased the land from Black families. He hired Alonzo Kelly, a Black, to sell lots to other Blacks.



*The Wall*

A large exodus from Overtown didn't begin, however, until Liberty Square was built in the late 1930s. The attraction: concrete structures with inside plumbing. Even well-off Blacks sold their homes in Overtown and moved to Liberty Square!

The "Wall" rose about four or five feet on the edge of Liberty City and separated the Black and White communities. It was built on the eastern boundary of Liberty Square, stretching along NW 12



Avenue from 62 Street to 71 Street. Torn down in the 1950s, today, the remnant of the Wall stands as a reminder of that era's prevailing racial attitudes.

The African Heritage Cultural Arts Center (6161 NW 22 Ave.) was built as a result of 1966 Congressional Legislation designed to aid local government efforts to reverse urban deterioration. The center was part of the Model City Program and was originally called the Model Cities Cultural Arts Center.

The Joseph Caleb Neighborhood Center (5400 NW 22 Ave), opened in 1977, also grew out of the Model City Program. The largest of eleven neighborhood centers, Caleb houses Miami-Dade, state, and private, nonprofit agencies. It is the home of the Black Archives.

## Brownsville

Georgette's Tea Room (NW 51 St./ 26 Ave) is a 13-room house built in 1940 by Georgette Scott Campbell. It was once a secluded and lavishly furnished getaway for Black celebrities seeking respite from the hustle and bustle of Overtown. Singer Billie Holiday kept



*Georgette's Tea Room*

a permanent residence in the Tea Room. Lincoln Memorial Park Cemetery (3001 NW 46 St.), established in 1924, houses 538 burial plots on a land area of 4,202 square feet. A beautiful restored coral rock archway graces the NW 46 Street entrance. Kelsey Pharr, a renowned Black funeral director, purchased Lincoln Memorial in 1937 from F.B. Miller, a White realtor. Noted pioneers buried in Lincoln Memorial include Pharr; Dr. William Sawyer, Miami-Dade's first Black physician and founder of Christian Hospital; H.E.S. Reeves, founder of the Miami Times, the county's oldest Black-owned newspaper; D.A. Dorsey, Miami's first Black millionaire; and Rev. John Culmer, rector of the Historical St. Agnes Episcopal Church in Overtown.

Both Evergreen Memorial Park (NW 43rd St./ 30th Ave.)

and Lincoln Memorial are known for their above-ground burial vaults. Evergreen holds approximately 3,300 plots on 13,201 square feet of land and was originally platted in 1921. Both cemeteries are now under the same management.



*D.A. Dorsey Mausoleum*

## Allapattah

Allapattah, located just north of State Road 112, was known as Railroad Shop Colored Addition. In 1947, Black families were forcibly evicted from the area through eminent domain to make way for homes, schools, a park, and a fire station for White families. As fate would have it, the area is once again a predominantly Black community.

## To learn more...

Call Miami-Dade Transit's Customer Services at 305-654-6545, Monday through Friday, 8:30 a.m. to 4:30 p.m., to make tour reservations for individuals and groups. Or view and print a copy of this brochure anytime on the MDT website, [miami-dade.gov/transit](http://miami-dade.gov/transit). Just click Publications and scroll down the page. Contact the Black Archives, 305-636-2390, for more historical details about African Americans in Miami-Dade County.